CHILD CARE CENTER CONNECTIONS
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Creating a Father Friendly Child Care Environment

by Stephen Green, Ph.D.

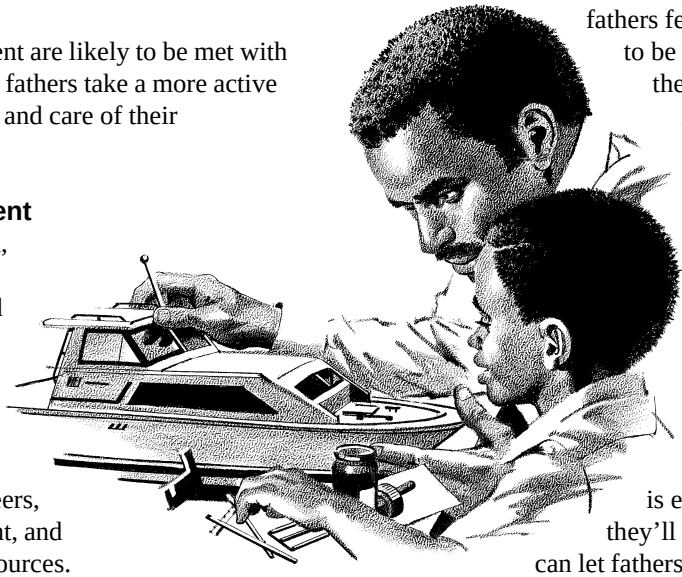
Are you in favor of parental involvement, including involvement by fathers and other men? What would your program look like if you were successful at involving fathers? Maybe you have already thought about these or similar questions. If not, hopefully you will consider them as you think about ways to expand your child care program.

Calls for greater father involvement are likely to be met with some opposition. However, when fathers take a more active and positive role in the education and care of their children, everyone benefits.

Benefits of Father Involvement

Children who grow up with warm, nurturing, and actively involved fathers (as opposed to uninvolved fathers) reap tremendous benefits including:

- better school performance,
- increased self-esteem,
- healthier relationships with peers,
- healthier sex-role development, and
- access to greater financial resources.



A recent study sheds light on the important influence fathers can have in their children's lives. Researchers discovered from surveys of over 20,000 parents that when fathers took an active role in their children's education (e.g., attended school meetings, volunteered at school), children were:

- more likely to receive A's,
- more likely to enjoy school, and
- less likely to repeat a grade.

Father Friendly Child Care

One of the first steps to increasing father involvement in your program is to ask yourself: "Is the child care environment in which I work father friendly?" In other words, do fathers feel welcome, and are they encouraged to be involved in the care and education of their children? Maybe you already involve fathers in a meaningful way. If so, great! Keep up the good work. But if you haven't had much success involving fathers or haven't given much thought to the issue, please consider the following suggestions offered by Levine, Murphy, and Wilson (1993):

- *Expect fathers to be involved*—if fathers are aware from the start that their involvement is expected and valued, chances are they'll participate in important ways. You can let fathers know you expect them to be involved by simply asking for their name, address, and phone number on your enrollment form. Once you have this information, use it when announcing program events, when sending letters to parents, when setting up parent-teacher conferences, and when making phone calls home.

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- *Put out the welcome mat*—fathers need to feel welcome in your child care center. Take time to talk to fathers as they drop off and pick up their children. Compliment dads when they attend program events and parent-teacher conferences. Display pictures of fathers/men on walls and in brochures. Let fathers know that they're welcome to visit the center and their children whenever they want to. Fathers are more likely to be involved if they feel comfortable with the staff and the facilities.
- *Find out what fathers/men want*—be careful not to make assumptions about what men want. Instead, go directly to the source. As you talk with fathers, find out what their interests are. Where do they work? What are their hobbies? In what ways would they like to be involved in your program? How much time would they be willing to commit to your program? Other possibilities include conducting a formal male interest survey or setting up a time when fathers can gather at your center to informally discuss their interests.
- *Recognize the hidden resistance from staff and mothers*—most staff and mothers will probably be open to the idea of getting fathers involved. Some, however, will be resistant to the idea. It may be that some have had negative experiences with men in their personal lives (e.g., abuse, abandonment). In such cases, there will naturally be some strong feelings. It's important to recognize the feelings and attitudes you, your staff, and parents have about men, and deal with them in a constructive manner.
- *Recognize the hidden fears of men*—it's easy to jump to conclusions and think that fathers don't want to be involved in your program. However, fathers may be afraid to become involved. Fathers who have not typically been involved in their children's formal child care may not know how to get involved. In addition, child care providers are often predominately female. This may cause some fathers to feel out of place, uncomfortable, and even unwelcome. As you seek to get fathers more involved, you can address some of their hidden fears by creating an environment that welcomes fathers, addresses their needs, and encourages their participation.

Conclusion

Fathers play a critical role in the development of their children. When fathers are actively involved in the care and education of their children, everyone can benefit. As child care providers, you have a unique opportunity to shape the lives of countless children. Your efforts at creating a father friendly child care environment will connect fathers with their children in a way that benefits children for life.

References

Levine, J.A., Murphy, D.T., & Wilson, S. (1993). *Getting Men Involved: Strategies for Early Childhood Programs*. New York, NY.: Scholastic.

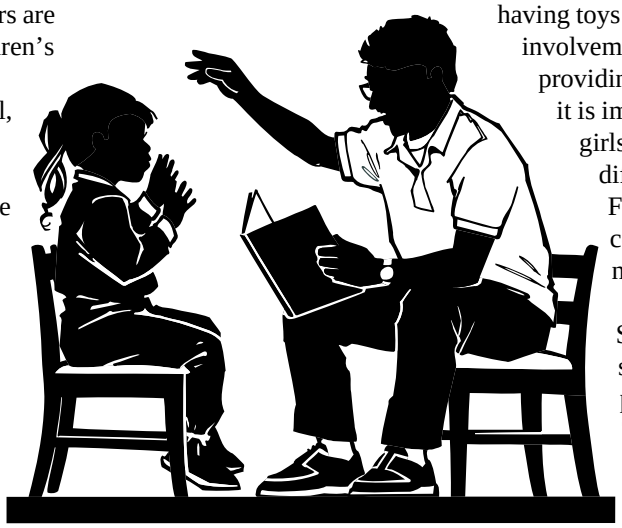
U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (1997). *Fathers' Involvement in Their Children's School*. NCES 98-091, by Christine Winquist Nord, DeeAnn Brimhall, & Jerry West. Washington, DC.

Dr. Stephen Green is an Assistant Professor and Child Development Specialist with the Texas Agricultural Extension Service. His areas of speciality include child development, child care, and father-child relationships.

Practical Ways to Involve Fathers in Child Care

by Richard L. Sale, Ph.D.

Traditionally, mothers have been responsible for child care; however, in today's society, fathers are becoming more involved in their children's care. Fathers have assumed this increasing role in the emotional, social, and physical development of their children due to more mothers being in the labor force. At the same time, more children are spending time in child care centers, with approximately 29 million children in some type of child care setting. All of these details point to the importance of considering how fathers can be involved in child care settings.



Several factors are important to quality child care in the child care center setting. *Parental involvement* is one of the most important aspects. Quality child care centers will always welcome parental visits and involvement in their programs. Communication of the workers with both the mother and the father can be helpful in children having a positive experience in the child care center. *Providing non-sexist equipment and experiences for children* is another important aspect of quality child care. This can involve having toys and other items that invite the involvement of both boys and girls. Also, when providing stories or examples to the children, it is important to show how both boys and girls can do these jobs or be involved in different activities in their communities. Fathers' involvement in the child care center can illustrate how men can be nurturing.

Some fathers have very flexible work schedules, so they may be available to provide help at the child care center. They may be willing to come during the day when mothers, who are now working outside of the home, are not available.

At a recent conference for workers who are involved in child care centers, home care centers, and after-school programs, the

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participants made the following suggestions to involve fathers in child care:

- Ask a father to drive a van for a trip that the child care center is taking.
- Invite a father to come to the child care center and tell about his job or career. If the job is in a setting that might be interesting and safe for children, the father might host the children at his place of work. Or, the father might conduct an "on-site" field trip by bringing items from his work to show the children. An example of this would be a firefighter bringing his equipment and uniform.
- Ask a father to be on the child care center advisory board. The input of parents in helping the center set policy or to evaluate its programs is valuable to the success of the child care center.
- Invite fathers to come and demonstrate their hobbies. This can involve traditional male domains such as fishing, or it can involve a father who is good at crafts or cooking.
- Ask fathers to spend time with the children on the playground. Fathers often may be more comfortable with the "rough and tumble" play of boys.
- Invite fathers to come at story time and read to the children.
- Have the fathers plan a camping trip for the children. If the children are young, it can be a day trip spent in nature and can involve cooking outside.
- Host a "Father's Day Social" in which the fathers come and perform skits.
- Sponsor a "Bring a Dad to School Day."
- Plan family cookouts, pot lucks, movie days, or craft days.
- Have a father-child basketball tournament.
- Host a father-child fashion show.
- Sponsor a father-child fishing tournament.

For all events that include fathers and their children, it is important for child care center workers to make sure all of the children have a father who can be involved, or have other fathers who are willing to "adopt" children for the event.

It is important to involve all parents in the child care program, but child care centers may want to make a special effort to involve the fathers since some may need extra encouragement to actively participate. By taking advantage of the changing role of fathers in their children's lives and encouraging their participation, child care centers can enhance their child care program and help fathers to enrich their children's lives.

References

Anonymous. (1998). Parents Whose Children Need Day Care Often Face Daily Crisis. *Population Today*, *26*, 1-2.

Anonymous (1998). What Constitutes High-Quality Care? *Human Ecology Forum, 26*, 8.

Van Ijzendoorn, M. H., Tavecchio, L. W. C., Stams, G. J., Verhoeven, M. and Reiling, E. (1998). Attunement Between Parent and Professional Caregivers: A Comparison of Childrearing Attitudes in Different Child-Care Settings. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, *60*, 771-781.

Dr. Richard Sale is an Assistant Professor of Child and Family Studies at Tarleton State University and a Family Life Specialist with the Texas Agricultural Extension Service. Dr. Sale also writes a column entitled Family Life for the Stephenville Empire Tribune.

Connections 2001

The Texas Agricultural Extension Service (TAEX) has been selected by the National Network for Child Care (NNCC) to develop the 2001 *Connections* newsletters series. Dr. Linda Ladd and Dr. Stephen Green, managing editors for the newsletters, are Extension specialists in the area of child and family development.

Topics planned for the 2001 issues will include: Father Involvement in Child Care (January–March), Character Education in Child Care (April–June), Child Care Nutrition (July–September), and Child Care Management (October–December).

Connections readers are encouraged to submit articles for future newsletters. Information for authors is available on the new *Connections* web site at http://fcs.tamu.edu/families/childcare/nncc/index.htm. Other information such as past newsletters, copyright information, and subscription forms are also available on the *Connections* web site.

Questions? Call Linda Ladd or Steve Green at (979) 845-3850 or l-ladd@tamu.edu and s-green@tamu.edu.

Fathering Resources

Books

Fatherhood by Ross D. Parke (1996). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Fatherneed: Why Father Care Is as Essential as Mother Care for Your Child by Kyle D. Pruett (2000). New York: The Free Press.

Getting Men Involved: Strategies for Early Childhood Programs by James A. Levine, Dennis T. Murphy, and Sherrill Wilson (1993). New York: Scholastic.

The Role of the Father in Child Development (3rd Ed.). Edited by Michael E. Lamb (1997). New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.

Web Sites

- Fatherhood Project: http://www.fatherhoodproject.org
- National Center for Fathering: http://www.fathers.com
- National Fatherhood Initiative: http://www.fatherhood.org
- Texas Agricultural Extension's Fathering Web Site: http://fcs.tamu.edu/fathering/index.htm

Child Abuse Prevention Month, April 2001

by Linda Ladd, Ph.D.

Child abuse is a community problem, and finding solutions depends on the involvement of people like you throughout the community. How can adults working in child care get involved? As advocates for children, child care workers can ensure that the children in their community, center, and home have a voice that is heard by local, state, and federal policy makers. Child care workers can team up with other committed adults in their local area to share their concern for the welfare of children and families.

What Child Care Providers Need to Know about Child Abuse and Neglect

Child abuse is defined as an injury or pattern of injuries to a child that is not accidental.

What are the Types of Child Abuse and Neglect?

- Physical Abuse: physical injury, such as beatings, burns, and bites
- Sexual Abuse: rape, fondling of the genitals, incest
- Emotional Abuse: constant criticism, insults, the withholding of love
- Neglect: the failure to provide food, clothing, shelter, or medical care

Who Abuses Children—and Where?

Most child abuse occurs in the family home. Parents, parent figures, siblings, family friends, and other trusted adults can abuse a child. Every person has the potential to abuse a child.

How Can You Tell if a Child is Being Abused?

Keep in mind that any one sign is not enough to prove that a child is being abused. Look for a pattern of repeated behaviors, and be aware of sudden changes in behavior.

Children who are physically abused may:

- be nervous around adults.
- be watchful, as though preparing for something bad to happen.
- have difficulty playing.
- act in an aggressive way towards adults, other children, or animals.
- be unable to concentrate at school.
- experience a change in their quality of work at school.
- find it difficult to trust other people and make friends.
- arrive at school too early or leave after the other children.

Children who are sexually abused may:

- behave differently after the abuse starts.
- care less about their appearance or their health.
- talk or act out sexually in a way that does not fit their age.
- have an irritation, pain, or injury to the genital area.
- be secretive and stop talking about their home life.
- regress and start soiling themselves.
- be unable to sleep.
- find a hug or other physical contact frightening.
- run away from home.

Children who are emotionally abused or neglected may:

- have a speech disorder, such as having difficulty learning to talk.
- find it hard to develop close relationships.
- be over-friendly to strangers.
- be unable to play imaginatively.
- have low self esteem and think badly of themselves.
- perform poorly at school.
- show signs of malnutrition

Child care providers can help protect a child from further abuse if they act when they see the signs of child abuse and call their local Child Protective Service Agency. The number for your county agency is in the front of your phone book.

Dr. Linda Ladd is an Associate Professor and Family Development Specialist with the Texas Agricultural Extension Service. Dr. Ladd's specialities are in children's mental health, families at risk, child care, and character education.

Reference

Prevent Child Abuse America (www.preventchildabuse.org)

Other child abuse resources are available at

- Prevent Child Abuse America (www.preventchildabuse.org)
- National Child Abuse Hotline 800-4-A-CHILD
- Family Resource Coalition www.frcs.org
- American Academy of Pediatrics (847) 434-4000
- American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children www.apsac.org